



For Immediate Release
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August 7, 2003

River District Charges Federal Government Illegally Reduced West Slope Water Allocation From Green Mountain Reservoir

GLENWOOD SPRINGS, CO - The Colorado River Water Conservation District, and five other major West Slope water districts, today filed suit against the United States Bureau of Reclamation, charging that Reclamation is illegally denying the West Slope its full entitlement of water from Green Mountain Reservoir. Reclamation placed restrictions on the full use of Green Mountain Reservoir during the most severe drought in Colorado's recorded history and unfairly charged all loss of water to the reservoir's West Slope beneficiaries, while fully protecting East Slope interests. Reclamation's actions directly contradict Congressional mandates on the operations of the reservoir.

The Bureau of Reclamation is charged by Congress to operate Green Mountain Reservoir in a fair and efficient manner. However, during the drought of 2002, Reclamation arbitrarily decided to impose restrictions on the use of the reservoir's water only to a certain portion of the reservoir's beneficiaries, due to concerns about earth movement at an ancient landslide area near the Town of Heeney. The water lost from the restrictions to the reservoir's "compensatory pool" is a crucial source of water for many West Slope farms, ranches and municipalities. This illegal and inequitable imposition of the full burden of lost yield on the West Slope cannot be accepted by West Slope water users.

Green Mountain Reservoir was constructed as the cornerstone of a compromise between Colorado's West Slope and water diverters from the East Slope. The purpose of the reservoir is to protect the West Slope from the removal of water by the massive Colorado Big-Thompson (C-BT) transmountain diversion project. The C-BT siphons the headwaters of the Colorado River through a tunnel under the Continental Divide to provide a supplemental source of water to cities and fields in northeastern Colorado. The C-BT annually diverts an average of 250,000 acre-feet of water from the headwaters of the Colorado River, or enough water to supply roughly half a million homes or approximately two million people.

Congressional authorization requires Green Mountain Reservoir, located on the Blue River north of the Town of Dillon, to hold 152,000 acre-feet of water. The contents of

the Reservoir are divided into two “pools.” The first pool of 52,000 acre-feet is a replacement pool designed to insulate the West Slope from upstream diversions by the C-BT Project. Water in the replacement pool is released to make up for the large volume of water taken to the East Slope by the C-BT Project’s diversions: water that would otherwise have been available to West Slope water users had the C-BT Project never been constructed. The remaining 100,000 acre-feet in the Reservoir is the “compensatory pool” that provides water for present and future needs on the West Slope as compensation for the removal of water from the Colorado River’s headwaters.

Reclamation has yet to develop a plan of action to fix the landslide problem and has announced that it will again impose operational restrictions on Green Mountain Reservoir during 2003 by limiting the rate at which water is released from the reservoir. As a result, less water will be available for release during irrigation season to the reservoir’s intended beneficiaries on the West Slope.

Five major water user organizations on the Colorado River join the River District in this lawsuit. They represent some of the oldest and most senior water rights on the River and include the Grand Valley Water Users Association, Grand Valley Irrigation Company, Orchard Mesa Irrigation District, Palisade Irrigation District, and Middle Park Water Conservancy District.

The Colorado River Water Conservation District is a state-chartered agency designated to protect the water resources of the Colorado River Basin. The Colorado River District is comprised of 15 West Slope counties, including Mesa, Rio Blanco, Moffat, Routt, Grand, Eagle, Summit, Pitkin, Gunnison, Garfield, Ouray, Delta and portions of Montrose, Sagauche and Hinsdale counties.

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